DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 420 067 CS 216 360

AUTHOR Hawk, Byron
TITLE Rogerian Rhetoric: Pedagogy and the Ethos of Seduction.
PUB DATE 1998-04-00
NOTE 9p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Conference on College Composition and Communication (49th, Chicago, IL, April 1-4, 1998).
PUB TYPE Opinion Papers (120) -- Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Class Activities; *Cooperative Learning; *Group Discussion; Higher Education; *Rhetoric; *Writing Assignments; *Writing Instruction
IDENTIFIERS Argumentation Theory; Collaborative Writing; *Rogers (Carl); *Student Cooperation

ABSTRACT

In "Rhetoric, Discovery and Change" (1970), R. Young, A. Becker, and K. Pike took Carl Rogers' empathetic approach out of the context of one-on-one therapy and put it into the writing classroom. They proposed the now standard formulaic structure of argumentation which emphasizes a strong thesis up front, a detailed account of the opposing argument, a heavily qualified personal position, and a conclusion showing that each side shares common ground. If it can be accepted that any use of Rogers' ideas, whether by therapists or writers, primarily functions as a means to construct ethos rather than establish a "true" identification, then the issue of adopting such a method for writing can be addressed. To break the isolated use of Rogerian "argument," a group assignment was constructed around Young, Becker, and Pike's Rogerian approach. Students are put in groups of three, then asked to assume the roles of opposing sides and a mediator, follow the four-staged Rogerian format, and construct a collaborative text. They are given four class periods for the assignment which revolves around face-to-face group discussion, on-line MOO or ChatNet discussion/writing, individual writing outside of class, and group revision. It makes sense to place multiple authors in a situation where they have to communicate with each other to get the assignment done. If the seduction of the will to produce can be resisted, then "Rogerian" could become a form of playful communication, perhaps a mode of rhetorical invention. (Contains 11 references.) (NKA)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
✓ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

ED 420 067

CS216360

Rogerian Rhetoric: Pedagogy and the Ethos of Seduction

Byron Hawk

I. Introduction

By now most of us in composition studies know of Carl Rogers and how his ideas have been appropriated by Young, Becker and Pike. They took Rogers' empathetic approach out of the context of one on one therapy and put it into the writing classroom by assuming that "we are more likely to establish *real* communication with people, especially on sensitive or controversial issues, if we give up traditional, legalistic kinds of arguments and use a non-threatening approach based on shared concerns and common goals" (Hairston, emphasis mine 50). If communication does shut down when someone feels threatened, then it would only make sense to restructure an argument so that the position of the speaker/writer is not initially the main focus. With this in mind, Young, Becker and Pike proposed the now standard formulaic structure of 1. a general intro that introduces the topic with no strong thesis up front, 2. a detailed account of the "opposing" argument presented in a way that the opponent will agree that you fully understand their position, 3. your own position though heavily qualified, 4. and a conclusion which shows that each side shares common ground, even though they differ on some points. But this appropriation to writing has two primary faults, one of which can be lessened by restructuring the assignment around social interaction, the other can only be addressed by throwing Rogerian out as a mode of argumentation. By adressing these two issues, Rogerian rhetoric can be re-formulated as a collaborative method of invention rather than a mode of argumentation and production.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
B Hawk
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

II. Problems with Rogerian

The problems I have stem from Rogers' assumption of a rational, centered, autonomous self and its ability to identify with the "Other," and with the appropriation of his primarily oral form of communication into a written one. For Rogers, the principal focus of the therapist is the need to be "genuine":

> First, and most important, is therapist congruence or genuineness-- his ability to be a *real person* with the client. Second is the therapist's ability to accept the client as a separate person without judging him or evaluating him. It is rather an unconditional acceptance-- that I'm able to accept you *as you are*. The third condition is a *real* empathetic understanding... If it is simply *reflection*, that's not good. That's just a technique. It must be a desire to understand empathetically, to *really* stand in the client's shoes and to see the world from his vantage point (Rogers, qtd. Ede, emphasis mine 44).

But how are we to know the "Other" in any kind of absolute, genuine sense? Even if there is such a thing as an isolated, genuine subject, we inevitably project ourselves onto it. No matter how genuinely we listen with empathy, we only hear what we think the the "Other" is saying filtered through our own terministic screens. If the I and the Other can never be completely contemporaneous, then it seems clear that the analyst is trying to build his/her ethos in order to enact a transference from the patient onto the therapist. No transference, no healing, no communication. But this transference is always a projection-- the patient's fantasy identity of the therapist and the therapist's predetermined subject position of/for the patient. From this perspective there can never be a genuine identification. Any Rogerian approach is always already a technique for the construction of ethos, whether oral or written.

At least in the oral form, though, there is a chance for dialogic interaction. "Lisa Ede points out that Rogers' wish to have the therapist's empathy replace judgment and guidance requires active dialogue: this is impossible in writing" (Lassner 222). In order to make the shift to a written form, the Rogerian approach takes a formulaic stance that not only structures the audience, but also puts the emphasis on the writer and his/her goals. Without an audience to reflect back their acceptance of the writer's version of their position, the audience can only become a projection of the writer. This projection exists merely as a means to the writer's end--an adoption of some or all of the writer's position by the audience. All three textbooks I examined, Nancy Wood's Perspectives on Argument, Ramage's and Bean's Writing Arguments, and Annette Rottenberg's Elements of Argument, use Young, Becker, and Pike's formula, which perpetuates the use of the apparent genuineness to listen as ethical support for a single writer's position.

III. Pedagogy and The Problem of the Social

If we accept the fact that any use of Rogers' ideas, whether by therapists or writers, primarily functions as a means to construct ethos rather than establish a "true" identification, then we can address the issue of adopting such a method for writing. In order to break the isolated use of Rogerian "argument," I constructed a group assignment around the Rogerian approach adopted by Young, Becker and Pike. Perceiving "invention as a social act" allowed me to found a Rogerian project based on a "one-text" negotiation process (LeFevre 43). The students are put in groups of three, then asked to assume the roles of opposing sides and a mediator, follow the 4 staged Rogerian format, and construct a collaborative text. They are given four class

periods to do the assignment which revolves around face to face group discussion, on-line MOO or ChatNet discussion/writing, individual writing outside of class, and group revision.

On the first day the students decide on a general topic. Two people take "opposing" sides of the issue; the third person functions as a mediator. I have them visit a MOO or Chatroom to brainstorm together on the various arguments surrounding the topic. Most programs allow them to either save their discussion to disc or print it out. This gives them the chance to review their ideas at home. Each person is expected to bring a draft to the next class: two people write "opposing" position papers and the mediator writes a general introduction. When they reconvene, each group member peer reviews all three drafts. The mediator should be sure that s/he understands each side and helps the other two formulate their arguments. The other two, in turn, should agree on the content and nature of the mediator's general introduction. After peer reviewing, they repeat the Chatroom process. It's good for the students to separate themselves from what they've written and brainstorm together for new ideas. I encourage them to focus on ethos and to concentrate on showing that they are all credible presenters of the various positions and understanding listeners of other arguments. They again save their discussions to disc and go home to revise their portions of the paper. The next class they repeat the same process of review and "Chat." For homework, the two sides are expected to finalize their positions. The mediator takes versions of each position home and begins to develop the common ground section of the paper. On the last day, each side brings in their final versions. The group discusses the mediator's conclusion and comes to some consensus about what they will accept as common ground. It is then the mediator's job to put all of the sections together in a paper that flows and turn in the

final draft. (Since the other two people did the research, the mediator has to put together the final paper. The work evens out.)

This assignment at least offsets two of the problems of adopting Rogers' ideas to writing. Rather than having a single person write a paper based solely on their own position, it makes sense to place multiple authors in a situation where they have to communicate with each other well enough to get the assignment done. This social reconfiguration of the assignment offsets the tendency to turn the paper into a single perspective argument with a deferred thesis. Individual students often turn the Rogerian assignment into a single perspective argument out of habit, which is easy to do given that Rogerian used for a single writer focuses primarily on the third "section" (your side heavily qualified). By putting the writer in a social situation, the primary focus gets placed on the fourth common ground section. It no longer matters which argument gets put in section 2 and which one gets put in section 3. There is no MY argument. It becomes OUR argument for common ground. Arguing for the fourth section rather than the third and turning the assignment into a group project, puts much more emphasis on ethos than argumentation. What the students are negotiating is not the issue so much as their own ability to see more than one side, listen, and work together. The use of groups and computers constructs a social space that conflates the binary of speaker/writer/listener/reader, and allows for the construction of ethos between people who actively participate in each of these roles at any given time.

IV. The Ethos of Seduction

What this assignment does not do, however, is resolve Rogers' "moral" problem of disingenuousness, or seduction, that seems to be inherent in the construction of ethos. Even though I shift the focus of the assignment from section 3 to section 4, both of them rest fundamentally on the establishment of ethos, which becomes a means to our own end or ultimately fosters our own communicative interests. But the lack of an autonomous subject, or our inability to access it, calls into question Rogers' "moral" dilemma. If we can never gain access to the "object" of our unethical interests, if the object merely reflects back the projection we ascribe to it, then it automatically resists our seduction. We assume that the "subject" who seduces dominates the "object" who is seduced. From Jean Baudrillard's reinscription of the notion of seduction, however, the innocent object of the seduction becomes an active player in the game. The "object" never lets itself be seduced, leaving seduction to a continuous reciprocal exchange. The game of negotiating ethos averts a subject/object binary. Seduction becomes the eminently ethical thing to do, because there is no master/slave relationship.

But precisely because of the endless play of seduction, there can be no final product. In foregoing the common, unethical notion of seduction, we automatically become counterposed to one of the predominant values of composition studies. To follow through with Baudrillard's image of seduction, we have to ignore the will to produce (an argument, essay, or even a resolution to verbal communication). If we can resist the seduction of the will to produce, then Rogerian could become a form of playful communication, an inventional device that is not predicated on a modern, coherent, stable subjectivity, but rather on a self that is always in the

process of becoming. Freed from the mode of production, Rogerian can perhaps become a mode of rhetorical invention.

Works Cited

Baillif, Michelle. "Seducing Composition: A Challenge to Identity-Disclosing Pedagogies" Rhetoric Review 16.1 (1997): 76-91.

Baudrillard, Jean. Seduction. 1979. Trans. Brian Singer. New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, 1990.

Ede, Lisa. "Is Rogerian Rhetoric Really Rogerian?" Rhetoric Review 3.1 (1984): 40-48.

Hairston, Maxine. "Using Carl Rogers' Communication Theories in the Composition Classroom" Rhetoric Review 1.1 (1982): 50-55.

Lassner, Phyllis. "Feminist Responses to Rogerian Argument" Rhetoric Review 8.2 (1990): 220-231.

LeFevre, Karen Burke. Invention as a Social Act. Carbondale, Il: Southern Illinois UP, 1987.

Ramage, J. and J. Bean. Writing Arguments. 4th ed. Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon, 1998.

Rottenberg, Annette. Elements of Argument. 5th ed. Boston, MA: Bedford Books, 1997.

Teich, Nathaniel, ed. Rogerian Perspectives: Collaborative Rhetoric for Oral and Written Communication. Norwood, NJ: Ablex, 1992.

Wood, Nancy. Perspectives on Argument. 2nd ed. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1998.

Young R., A. Becker and K. Pike. Rhetoric, Discovery and Change. New York, NY: Harcourt, Brace, 1970.